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"Twilight Is Not Good for Maidens": Vampirism and the Insemination of Evil in Christina Rossetti's "Goblin Market"

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"TWILIGHT IS NOT GOOD FOR MAIDENS":
VAMPIRISM AND THE INSEMINATION OF EVIL
IN CHRISTINA ROSSETTI'S GOBLIN MARKET

A Thesis

Presented to

The Faculty of the Department of English
The College of William and Mary in Virginia

In Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Arts

by

David Frederick Morrill

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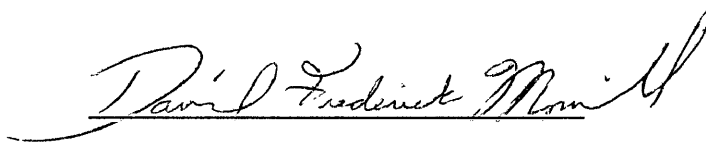
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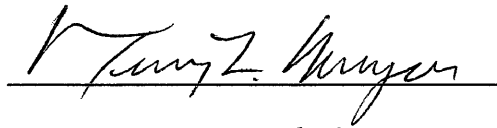
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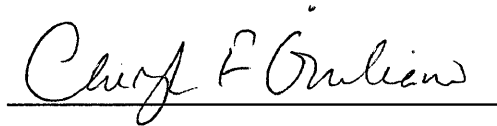
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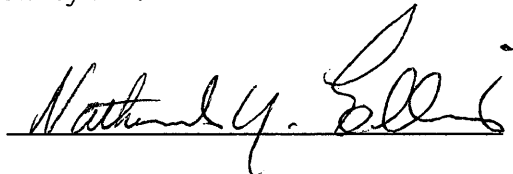
Approved, November 1987

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Terry L. Meyers, Chair

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Cheryl F. Giuliano

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Nathaniel Y. Elliott

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ABSTRACT

Ostensibly a fairy tale (and long a nursery favorite), Christina Rossetti's Goblin Market nevertheless puzzles readers with its sometimes blatant undercurrent of the erotic and the horrifying. Certain of the poem's lurid dynamics--acts of biting and sucking, enervation, early death, and a fall from grace--are best explained in conjunction with the steady diet of Gothic romances, tales of terror, and romantic poetry that Christina Rossetti devoured as a young woman. Indeed, John Polidori's sensational novel, The Vampyre, contains much of the supernatural and psychosexual motifs found in Goblin Market. Perhaps influenced by this work (Polidori was, after all, Christina's uncle), Christina Rossetti utilizes the myth of vampirism to suggest a libidinal analogue in which young maidens are not only vampirized by the seductive talents of evil men, but also by their own desires for the sensual possibilities that the masculine world offers. Such a possession rapes its victims, tears away masks of innocence, and drains life as Rossetti's heroines fall prey to the exotic yet fearful pleasures of a dark and mysterious Gothic underworld--the world of adolescence itself.

"TWILIGHT IS NOT GOOD FOR MAIDENS":
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IN CHRISTINA ROSSETTI'S GOBLIN MARKET

Christina Rossetti, possibly anticipating the machinations of devious critics, casually dismissed Goblin Market as a mere fairy story devoid of "any profound or ulterior meaning" (Bell 207). Despite her efforts the work stubbornly remains--like the luscious goblin fruits it describes--ripe and ready for picking as one of the most enigmatic poems of the Victorian age. Echoing William Michael Rossetti's comment that "different minds may be likely to read different messages" (Poetical Works 459), biographer Georgina Battiscombe offers several meanings: a straightforward fairy story, a parable of temptation, sin and redemption, a hymn in praise of sisterly devotion, or a sexual fantasy (105). Other readings, whether biographical, Freudian, or Feminist, can be persuasive, but with so many things happening (and much more hinted at) in the poem, they seem to explain only parts of a larger puzzle. Clearly what is missing is a mythological frame that would tie the supernatural language and incidents together into a logical, self-contained system. Such a nexus may be provided in terms of the schauer-romantik literature Christina Rossetti read as a young woman, in particular the possible influence of John Polidori's lurid novel, The Vampyre (1819), which depicts a Gothic vocabulary and metaphysical background strikingly similar to that of Goblin Market. Indeed, the subjugation and rejuvenation of Laura, the strange death of Jeanie, and the curious "oral" preoccupations with sucking and excessive thirst hint to Polidori's depiction of the accursed love of the vampiric fatal man--a love that feeds "violent

excitement" and "fashionable vice." Barely disguising the myth behind the poem's fairy-tale atmosphere, Christina Rossetti suggests a libidinal analogue in which innocent maidens are not only enervated but also quite possibly transformed into ravening sexual creatures. Lizzy and Laura become participants in a Manichaeian struggle between the saintly Victorian and her sensuous "Other," an enthrallment that rejects the status quo in favor of a monstrous, Gothic world of unrestrained desire and nightmarish sexuality.

Studies of influence behind Goblin Market do not reflect this descent into the Gothic underworld. B. Ifor Evans has argued that the work has "a theme and movement suggesting many things...not assignable to one source" (156). Yet he nevertheless suggests that Thomas Keightley's Fairy Mythology provides the whole decor of Goblin Market. He also mentions the cute fairy world of A Midsummer Night's Dream and William Allingham's The Fairies, as well as the charming descriptions of London street pedlars in Hone's Every-Day Book. While no one would disagree that these are possible sources, Evans admits that none of the stories contain the plot of Goblin Market. Nor do they really take into account the lurid depictions of the goblin merchant men: the goblins in Rossetti's poem are hardly the sprightly, mischievous elves of folklore who skim the cream off milk, blow out candles, and box the ears of young men. They are darker, more mysterious, more powerful, more terrifying, and more human. Above all their actions are vampiric: they dole out strange, exotic fruits to young women who become drained, languid, bloodless.

Not surprisingly, Stephen Connor mentions "intrusions into, disturbances of the economy of the fairy tale structure" in his discussion of the poem (443). Such intrusions, I believe, are best explained in

terms of a dark descent into a Gothic underworld--a landscape that Christina Rossetti was familiar with since childhood. In her biography, Christina Rossetti: A Divided Life, Georgina Battiscombe discusses some of the works read by the Rossetti family and concludes that when Rossetti outgrew her fairy stories or the Arabian Nights she took to reading the blood-curdling romances of Anne Radcliffe, "Monk" Lewis, and Charles Maturin (21). Such books were readily available in the Polidori library at Holmer Green: Christina's grandfather, Gaetano, was a fervent admirer of Romantic literature and for anything dealing with the supernatural (he had, for instance, translated The Castle of Otranto into Italian). Consequently, the children were also exposed to Allan Cunningham's horror stories, Sir Walter Scott's novels, and the well-known German tale Sidonia the Sorceress (Zaturenska 31). Equally important were the works of the Romantics, and Battiscombe mentions the existence of a two-volume manuscript book in which the children copied works of, among others, Southey, Poe, Byron, and Coleridge, all of whom had inherited from the Gothic a predilection for the grotesque and the sensational.

Entertainment such as this, not unlike the "Creature Feature" that glues modern children to the television on a Saturday afternoon, obviously had a profound influence on the Rossetti children and their art. Rossetti's biographers all agree that she spent her childhood in gloomy reflection wherein "the morbid or the demonic appeared in everything she loved" (Weintraub 9). Dante Gabriel Rossetti was equally affected, and the study in the Rossetti home on Charlotte Street "seemed a 'haunted room,' where 'the very books had a conscious and external life of their own.' Alone there, his imagination racing, he would often grow afraid" (Weintraub 6).

He would also create his own examples of the schauer-romantik. When he was sixteen, he translated Bürger's Lenore from the German. Among its lively Gothic horrors (William Michael Rossetti called the work "spirited and fairly efficient") is a scene where the ghostly William returns from the grave to finally "wed" Lenore:

Groans from the earth and shrieks in the air!
Howling and wailing everywhere!
Half dead, half living, the soul of Lenore
Fought as it never had fought before. (Works 506)

Love here is equated with death, pleasure with pain, and Lenore's marriage bed becomes a coffin "still, narrow, and cool" (l. 139). Perhaps this passage influenced the depiction of Lizzie's heroic rescue in Goblin Market: as she wards off the malevolent goblins ("barking, mewing, hissing, mocking"), she literally fights to retain her own soul unlike the unfortunate Jeanie who "for joys brides hope to have / Fell sick and died" (ll. 314-15 in Poetical Works 1-8).

Christina Rossetti may have borrowed from such characters either consciously or subconsciously. Gwyneth Hatton writes that fantastic novels (in particular those of Charles Maturin) had a profound effect on Rossetti's creative method:

The way in which Christina's imagination set upon these portrayals of frustrated love and conflicts between sacred and profane love in which she transmuted (no doubt unconsciously) the novelist's materials for her own purposes, indicates that the tendencies were lying dormant within her; the novels merely awoke latent sympathies and gave them definite shape. (Quoted in Battiscombe 42)

Maturin is important here. Rossetti based a number of poems on his novels, in particular his chilling Melmoth the Wanderer (1820).¹

Melmoth is fatal to everyone he meets, and when he interrupts a wedding

celebration and simply fixes everyone with a preternatural stare, the bride dies and the bridegroom is driven insane. In similar fashion he corrupts Immalee, the "innocent child of Nature," who dies broken-hearted in prison after she has given birth to Melmoth's child. In The Romantic Agony, Mario Praz refers to Melmoth as "a kind of Wandering Jew crossed with Byronic vampire" (79) and, indeed, it is to this mythical figure we must turn in order to understand better the nightmarish landscape of Goblin Market.

William Patrick Day defines the vampire (and his particular power over women) as "the walking, if not precisely living, representation of the Gothic world" (7), a creature whose victims enter "a state of enthrallment, first to the possibilities of the Gothic world, then to its horrors" (23). Such is Laura's fate when she samples the goblin fruits. She is, in effect, vampirized, and slowly wastes away, becoming that which she both fears and desires--a creature who is sensual, uninhibited, and, worse for Rossetti, unable to attain lasting peace.

In this respect, Rossetti is working within a fixed tradition. Despite her casual dismissal of the poem, Goblin Market surely evinces the characteristic of "erotic sensibility" that Mario Praz sees recurring "as insistently as myths engendered in the ferment of the blood" throughout the nineteenth century. He adds that "in no other literary period...has sex been so obviously the mainspring of works of imagination" (xv), works that reinforce the inseparability of pleasure and pain and, as in Poe's tales, a thirst for unrealizable love which ends in vampirism (147). The majority of Rossetti's poems demonstrate this unrealizable love--unrealizable because, through a morbid reversal of values, death brings happiness while love leads to grief. Goblin Market perhaps depicts

this paradox in its most perverse terms and, not surprisingly, most critics note that it is quite unlike anything else she wrote.

The poem is unique (more erotic, more horrifying) because Christina Rossetti is playing with Gothic and Romantic conventions, especially with the theme of vampirism. Such a theme, according to Ernest Jones, is connected with the idea of a "Beyond," a mysterious land of boundless possibilities where all fantasies are realized and all secrets revealed (108). More important, the belief yields plain indication of most kinds of sexual perversions (98), a theory reinforced more recently by James Twitchell: "The myth is loaded with sexual excitement; yet there is no mention of sexuality. It is sex without genitalia, sex without confusion, sex without responsibility, sex without guilt, sex without love--better yet, sex without mention" ("The Vampire Myth," 88). Blood itself is sexually suggestive, and when the vampire bites and sucks the throat of his victim, he is, on a symbolical level, enacting a scene of invasion and rape which eventually inseminates the victim with evil.

It need hardly be said that biting and sucking are the characteristic habits of the vampire in any literary or cinematic adaptation, habits which intrude upon Lizzie and Laura's ostensibly playful and innocent landscape. For Ellen Moers, "suck" is "the central verb" of Goblin Market: "sucking with mixed lust and pain is, among the poem's Pre-Raphaelite profusion of colors and tastes, the particular sensation carried to an extreme that must be called perverse" (102). Perverse, yes, but Moers avoids the issue of vampirism with the more conventional view that Rossetti wrote a poem about "the erotic life of children." The implications of pleasure, pain, sucking, and enervation suggest otherwise, and Goblin Market ultimately has more in common with such later Gothic

showpieces as Le Fanu's Carmilla (1872) and Stoker's Dracula (1897) than Rossetti scholars have so far realized.

Doubtless the reason for this neglect of the imagery lies in a misunderstanding of the vampiric myth due to its vulgarization in recent exploitation novels and the cinema. To mention a vampire today is to immediately conjure up a ludicrous vision of a pale-faced ogre in dinner jacket and opera cape, an ogre who talks with a thick Hungarian accent while chasing semi-clad showgirls around cardboard graveyard sets--hardly fodder for serious scholarship. The image is a false and unsatisfying representation of a more respectable and commanding figure who began in English literature as a descendant of the Byronic hero, Wandering Jew, and Gothic villain of the early nineteenth century, a figure who "acts as we do not dare to act, lives as we do not dare to live, enjoys and suffers as we do not dare to" (Hennesey 344). It is this suggestion of extreme freedom and power that has ingrained the image in the popular consciousness. As James Twitchell points out in his fascinating study The Living Dead: A Study of the Vampire in Romantic Literature, it is important to remember that "in terms of cultural influence and currency, the vampire is far more important...than all the Wandering Jews, Don Juans, Reclusive Poets, Little Nells; in fact he is probably the most enduring and prolific mythic figure we have" (ix). Mario Praz, for instance, refers to "the vampirism about which the Romantics raved" (32), and Blake, Poe, Coleridge, the Brontës, Shelley, and Keats all used the myth to explain aspects of interpersonal relations (Twitchell ix). That Christina Rossetti read these people suggests possible influence by such fatal women as Coleridge's Geraldine, Keats's Lamia and La Belle Dame Sans Merci, Charlotte Brontë's Bertha Rochester, or Poe's Ligeia and

Morella--all representative of forbidden lusts and all capable of enervating those who are unfortunate enough to meet them.

While such works depict a darker Gothic world, they do not necessarily present vampirism in its most concrete terms. Geraldine and La Belle Dame may exert vampiric influence over their victims, but they are never referred to directly as vampires and their actions are couched in language that only hint at terrible possibilities as they drain the life forces from others. One work, however, would have given Christina Rossetti free and unmistakable access to the psychodynamics of the myth--a work written by a man whose sole claim to literary fame was to write the first vampire novel in English literature. Better still, he also happened to be Christina Rossetti's uncle.

Rossetti biographer Dorothy Stuart describes John Polidori as a character more Byronic than his master and companion--Byron himself (6). His novel, The Vampyre, which appeared in Colburn's New Monthly Magazine in April 1819, was the first complete treatment of the myth as we know it today.² And while Polidori committed suicide in 1821, he seems to have held an unusual place in his niece's imagination. Marya Zaturenska suggests that, as a relative (Dante Gabriel refers to him as Frances Rossetti's favorite brother), Polidori was

not one that delicate, refined, spinster nieces could remember without a shudder. His name was never mentioned in the Rossetti or Polidori households--but his portrait hung in Christina's house and was in the room where she died. What memories of sin, of unbridled passions, and suicide, that sin for which in her mind there was no expiation, flowed down from the wall? (14)

Dolores Rosenblum refers to that portrait as a possible "family totem of Byronic doom and Byronic glamour" (26). And Polidori's death itself may have fed Rossetti's imagination. Like the vampire or ghost, a suicide

cannot find rest in the grave (in Christian superstition a suicide must be buried at the crossroads to prevent it from rising as an un-dead).

Rossetti's own spiritual beliefs may have subconsciously relegated her uncle to a living hell from which he could never escape. Marya Zaturenska mentions this dreadful fascination and wonders, "Did she too have moments when she dreamed of self-destruction? Did Hell hold him eternally? Would prayers for him help? Would God hear them?" (281). It is this inability to truly "know"--this doubt--that is so horrifying, and Rossetti hints as much in Jeanie's unnatural death in Goblin Market which is itself a type of suicide carried out by a girl whose only crime is a peep into the unknown.

Polidori's novel demonstrates this "suicide" as well as the metaphysics of the myth that Rossetti would incorporate into her own tale of seduction and desire. In the "Introduction" to The Vampyre, Polidori clinically lists the general backgrounds of the superstition: we learn that vampirism "formed the subject of many wonderful stories, still extant, of the dead rising from their graves, and feeding upon the blood of the young and beautiful" (261); and that "vampyres nightly imbibed a certain portion of the blood of their victims, who became emaciated, lost their strength, and speedily died of consumptions" (261). A footnote adds that this is not true death, but rather a process wherein the victim becomes equally infected by evil: "The universal belief is, that a person sucked by a vampyre becomes a vampyre himself, and sucks in his turn" (261). The key verb here is, again, "to suck." But whereas Polidori restrains his usage to a scientific, explanatory footnote, Rossetti wholeheartedly creates sights and sounds that are decidedly erotic:

She sucked and sucked and sucked the more
Fruits which that unknown orchard bore;

She sucked until her lips were sore... (11. 134-36)

While Laura is not herself sucked (in fact she is the active catalyst in her initiation into evil through sucking), her link with vampirism is continually foreshadowed in Polidori's introduction. He recounts how vampirism is a sort of punishment after death for some heinous crime; the deceased is not only doomed to vampirize, but also compelled to destroy those beings he loved most in life. To illustrate this notion, Polidori quotes from Byron's Giaour (1813):

But first on earth, as Vampyre sent,
Thy corse shall from its tomb be rent;
Then ghastly haunt the native place,
And suck the blood of all thy race;
There from thy daughter, sister, wife,
At midnight drain the stream of life;
Yet loathe the banquet which perforce
Must feed thy livid living corse. (262)

Here are the popular attributes of vampirism: the inability to rest in peace because of some sort of crime committed in life, the characteristic habit of sucking blood, and the fatal effect the curse has on the monster's family.

After recounting one or two "historical" cases of the myth, Polidori goes on to the tale proper--that of the infamous Lord Ruthven, a dark, mysterious, and curiously detached nobleman who frequents the fashionable salons of London: "He gazed upon the mirth around him, as if he could not participate therein. Apparently, the light laughter of the fair only attracted his attention, that he might by a look quell it, and throw fear into those breasts where thoughtlessness reigned (265). Despite (or because of) his mysterious nature, Ruthven is strangely popular and is considered something of a violent thrill to the bored minions of high

society ("all wished to see him" [265]). Yet he also has a "reputation for a winning tongue" (266) and powers of seduction that become cause for concern. The friends of the naïve protagonist, Aubrey, warn

...that [Ruthven's] character was dreadfully vicious, for that the possession of irresistible powers of seduction, rendered his licentious habits more dangerous to society. It had been discovered...that his victim, the partner of his guilt, should be hurled from the pinnacle of unsullied virtue, down to the lowest abyss of infamy and degradation: in fine, that all those females whom he had sought, apparently on account of their virtue, had, since his departure, thrown even the mask aside, and had not scrupled to expose the whole deformity of their vices to the public gaze. (269)

Ruthven here is a corrupting rake: seductive, dangerous, inspiring both pleasure and fear. He functions as a symbol for all that is decadent in the world. His liberal charity feeds corruption, yet there is a price to be paid--"all those upon whom [his charity] was bestowed, inevitably found that there was a curse upon it, for they were all either led to the scaffold, or sunk to the lowest and the most abject misery" (268).

Rossetti's goblins function in a similar manner: like Ruthven their "tones as smooth as honey" (l. 108) and their powers of seduction inevitably corrupt. Much worse, they are equally skilled in revealing "the inward workings of the heart" (The Vampyre 265) which cause Laura to discard her repressions (or mask) to reveal a corrupt, sensuous darkside behind a facade of innocence.

But the early part of Polidori's novel is concerned with society women, and we would expect them to be tainted by the lure of the world. Not so the Greek sylph, Ianthé, whom Aubrey meets in his eastern travels. Hers is "innocence, youth, and beauty, unaffected by crowded drawing-rooms and stifling balls" (271) and Aubrey is naturally attracted as her innocence forms a contrast "with all the affected virtues of the women

among whom he had sought for his vision of romance" (271). As a frank, infantile country girl (a spiritual ancestor of Lizzie and Laura), Ianthe is nevertheless conversant with the best local superstitions and taboos. It seems that she spends most of her time warning Aubrey about vampires. As a sophisticated society figure, however, he laughs off these warnings and decides to undertake an all-day excursion. Ianthe and her parents begin to worry: "they all at once begged of him not to return at night, as he must necessarily pass through a wood, where no Greek would ever remain, after the day had closed, upon any consideration. They described it as the resort of the vampyres in their nocturnal orgies" (272). In time-honored Gothic tradition Aubrey is late in returning, a storm whips up, and he must find refuge in a hovel in the woods. But "as he approached, the thunders for a moment silent, allowed him to hear the dreadful shrieks of a woman mingling with the stifled, exultant mockery of a laugh" (273). The reader easily guesses what follows: Ruthven has attacked Ianthe, that "object of so many bright and fairy visions, now fallen with the flower of life that had died within her" (274). James Twitchell is somewhat perplexed: "What she was doing in the same woods that she knew to be haunted by vampires is anyone's guess" (110). The answer seems ridiculously simple. She wanted to be in the same woods--she was probably frightened but nevertheless attracted to the mysteries of evil as surely as Jeanie and Laura in Goblin Market ("We must not look at goblin men, / We must not buy their fruits," cautions Laura, yet she goes right ahead and inculcates herself in evil). It is taboo and therefore must be tried out--human curiosity cannot be overcome in both The Vampyre and Goblin Market, and with predictably disastrous results for the curious. Indeed, Polidori's image of the withered flower (taken perhaps

from Byron's "Thy flowers are withered on the stem") is virtually repeated in Rossetti's poem as the flowers on Jeanie's grave wither and die despite Lizzie's efforts. In both cases a demonic scene of barely disguised rape is carried out, hidden under the pretense of the fantastic; and the innocent are corrupted with unspeakable evil. It is puberty itself--an illness that drains its victims as surely as adolescence did to Christina Rossetti.

While no direct evidence proves that Christina Rossetti read her uncle's novel, it seems reasonable to assume that she had at some point included it in her fantastic childhood reading.³ Both Dante Gabriel and William Michael mention it on occasion, and it may have been among the books at the Polidori library at Holmer-Green. Other readings may have combined with this sensational tale of terror in evoking the particularly haunted landscape of the poem. While not treating Goblin Market's suggestions of the vampiric, Dorothy Mermin does note that "the conflation of erotic and imaginative significance in a story about non-human objects of desire which exist outside of time recalls La Belle Dame Sans Merci, whose victims eat strange fruit in fairyland and then loiter, turn pale, starve, and waste away" (108). La Belle Dame may use exotic foods to ensnare her victims, but she speaks in strange tongues, may be remorseful over what she must do, and, yes, her victims become very thirsty. In short, she is a vampire, a being who initiates her male victims into sexuality as surely as the goblins do to Laura and Jeanie in Goblin Market.⁴

Equally important are parallels with Coleridge's Christabel. Certain images and subtle hints let the reader know that some grisly sort of energy exchange is enacted in Christabel's bedroom: Geraldine has to be

lifted over a threshold, the name of the Virgin causes her discomfort, and she somehow manages to drain Christabel's energy after they have spent the night together. Geraldine, whose breasts were withered, awakens full of new vigor and displays the same breasts now swelling tight against her garments. As Arthur Nethercot points out, "she is demon, witch, snake, vampire, and appealing woman by turns and sometimes at the same moment" (185),⁵ an amorphous figure that Rossetti would recreate in "The World" as a symbol for the corrupting effect of the physical and the sensual.

Like Keats and Coleridge, Christina Rossetti tantalizingly suggests but never reveals, dangles the hints in front of us and then withdraws them. In "Winter: My Secret" she writes:

You want to hear it? well:
Only, my secret's mine, and I won't tell.

Or, after all, perhaps there's none:
Suppose there is no secret after all,
But only just my fun. (Poetical Works 336)

The speaker is coy, teasing, playful, and satisfied that she has the answers we as readers would want to know. The poem functions both as a manifesto of sorts on how Rossetti writes her poetry and how it is read by others. In the case of Goblin Market the use of suggestive expression seemingly belies her statement that the poem is a mere fairy tale. She has her secrets and occasionally lets the reader in on them with well-placed images which transform her fairy-tale setting into a nightmarish landscape of the mind.

Taken further, the poem becomes a showpiece for the perils of metaphorical, if not literal, vampirism (appealing to Rossetti because it is sex without mention). The sense of evil that envelops Lizzie and Laura's innocent world hearkens back to the motif of the pure woman

pursued by the rake, the staple of popular literature from Richardson to the Gothic novel (in particular Polidori). The rake has designs on the woman's virtue, the loss of which produces a fallen woman, a soiled thing without identity, doomed to a living death or a secluded repentance.

Rossetti evokes this fall in its own particular landscape to depict the goblins as dark aspects of primordial evil in opposition to the civilizing innocence of Lizzie and Laura. Thomas Burnett Swann says of the goblins:

...usually they coax and entreat, but sometimes they drop masks and reveal themselves in pure evil. H. P. Lovecraft and other writers of horror have supposed that beyond this world we know, there are other, alien worlds, where evil broods across the shadowed landscapes. Surely Christina's goblins belong to such a place. They are creatures out of time and space, real as the nocturnal phantoms that chase us down the corridors of the sleepy mind, and as inescapable. Broad daylight will dissipate them, but here, in the ageless world of shadow, they are unconquerable --except by innocence. (100)

Swann's comment almost seems to have in mind Henry Fuseli's 1781 painting, The Nightmare, in which a small, animalistic demon crouches in vampiric fashion over a swooning victim. Its subject represents oppression, or the fear of nocturnal violation in the uncontrollable subconscious world of sleep. Ernest Jones reveals that such nocturnal phantoms represent a primarily sexual nature, and that a nightly visit from a vampiric being who first exhausts the victim with passionate embraces and then withdraws a vital fluid points only to a natural and common process--namely "to nocturnal emissions accompanied with dreams of a more or less erotic nature. In the unconscious mind blood is commonly an equivalent for semen" (119).

While the goblins do not actually drink Laura's blood, their fruits do secrete a blood or semen-like substance (from "fruit globes fair or red"), especially when Lizzie laughs

...in heart to feel the drip
 Of juice that syruped all her face,
 And lodged in dimples of her chin,
 And streaked her neck which quaked like curd.
 (ll. 433-36)

It is no wonder then that Maureen Duffy sees the poem as an erotic fantasy full of sexual symbols. The goblins are "mostly in phallic bird and fish forms" (290), the result being that Rossetti equates a vampiric transference of energy with the sexual act.

Christina Rossetti explores this sexual interaction in several poems, all haunting, and all demonstrating how, in the love relationship, one partner gains mastery and fattens emotionally as the other wastes away. "In an Artist's Studio" is perhaps the most famous utterance of what Jerome McGann refers to as the "daemonium" of love--a sort of "introverted vampirism" (246). Lizzie Siddal is literally trapped within the artist's idealizations: "One face looks out from all his canvases, / One selfsame figure sits or walks or leans" (Poetical Works 330). Lizzie is faceless, without identity, and she represents this "same one meaning" in every work. Dante Gabriel Rossetti as the masculine artist "feeds upon her face by day and night," and as he creates his ideal ("Fair as the moon and joyful as the light") he is oblivious to the woman's needs. She is "wan with waiting" and "with sorrow dim," recalling a similar process in Poe's "The Oval Portrait" in which the female actually pines and dies once the artist applies his last brushstroke (or symbolic masturbation).

The process is not always the result of male dominance either. In "Cannot Sweeten" a female speaker expresses strong guilt over some unnamable crime. "I slew my love with an evil eye," she laments, and then describes herself in terms of a fatal woman:

'Yet I loved him not for his loving,
 While I played with his love and truth,
 Not loving him for his loving,
 Wasting his joy, wasting his youth.

'I ate his life as a banquet,
 I drank his life as new wine,
 I fattened upon his leanness,
 Mine to flourish and his to pine.' (Poetical Works 381-82)

The imagery suggests vampirism: the woman exerts emotional control over the male and he wastes away in the process. The situation takes a violent turn in "A Nightmare: Fragment" (Poetical Works 333) in which the female speaker has somehow destroyed her male lover--"a friend in ghostland-- / Early found, ah me how early lost!" The spare imagery is carefully weighed for its emotional and horrific content: "Blood-red seaweeds drip along that coastland / By the strong sea wrenched and tost." The sea, violent in motion, suggests strong, destructive sexuality; and it throws back the blood-red seaweed as proof of some terrible sexual misdeed. The departed male "hunts" the speaker "like a nightmare" and she adds, "Without light I see a blasting sight there, / See a secret I must keep." The secret hides a love-crime--an imbalance in which the ascendancy lies with the female.

On the other hand, healthy love (if such a thing is possible in the Rossetti canon) is carefully balanced. In Monna Innominata (Sonnet 4) the speaker discusses an ideal:

For verily love knows not 'mine' or 'thine';
 With separate 'I' and 'thou' free love has done,
 For one is both and both are one in love:
 Rich love knows not of 'thine that is not mine';
 Both have the strength and both the length thereof,
 Both of us, of the love which makes us one.

(Poetical Works 60)

But such a balance is rare. One instead thinks of yet another

guilt-ridden speaker in "A Peal of Bells" who sits among her sumptuous earthly pleasures--"my golden plates with fruit, / Golden fruit, fresh-plucked and ripe"--while her lover lies dead--"There is no music more for him. / His lights are out, his feast is done" (Poetical Works 331).

In Goblin Market the imbalance clearly rests in the male's favor. While they are described as goblins, Christina Rossetti never lets us forget their all-too-human qualities. William Michael Rossetti writes:

The authoress does not appear to represent her goblins as having the actual configuration of brute animals; it was Dante Rossetti who did that in his illustration to the poem (he allows human hands, however). I possess a copy of the Goblin Market volume, 1862, with magical water-colour sketches by Christina.... She draws several of the goblins,--all very slim agile figures in a close-fitting garb of blue; their faces, hands, and feet are sometimes human, sometimes brute-like, but of a scarcely definable type. (Poetical Works 460)

Or perhaps they may be defined in terms of her Fuseli-like vampiric imagery. The goblins can be seen as types of fatal men whose main seductive method is to appear pleasing to the victim while remaining extremely dangerous. Elizabeth MacAndrew notes that an animal figure is "rendered grotesque by being given human perceptions and superhuman powers, not simply brute force. Consequently, when figures of the grotesque appear as non-human, supernatural beings, they still make the sense of evil darker and less optimistic" (165-66). Rossetti reverses the image: men are depicted in animalistic terms and the noises they make are remarkably similar to vampiric hypnosis (remember Lord Ruthven), indicated when Laura

...heard a voice like voice of doves
Cooing all together:
They sounded kind and full of loves
In the pleasant weather. (ll. 77-80)

Because of its other-worldly nature, the vampire cannot cross a threshold until invited. Rossetti implies this aspect of the myth when the goblin brothers reach Laura:

They stood stock still upon the moss,
Leering at each other,
Brother with queer brother. (ll. 92-94)

Laura invites them over the threshold when she clips "a precious golden lock." James Twitchell demonstrates the scene in vampiric lore:

...the victim must make some inviting move; she must unhasp the window, open the door, do anything that shows she is acceding, even slightly. This crucial point is repeated in almost all the literary adaptations, for the vampire cannot cross a threshold without this invitation; he is bound to wait pathetically like a schoolboy until invited in. (10)

Laura's clipping the golden lock is the unhasping of the window, an action that is not surprising given her curiosity throughout the poem. (Indeed, Maureen Duffy interprets the lock as pubic hair, a theory that reinforces the poem's preoccupation with sexuality [290].)

Christina Rossetti may have lifted this image of the golden lock from two sources, both of which deal with vampires. In The Giaour, Byron describes how the father (now an un-dead) must rampage through his family as punishment for his sins:

But one that for thy crime must fall,
The youngest, best beloved of all,
Shall bless thee with a father's name--
That word shall wrap thy heart in flame!
Yet thou must end thy task and mark
Her cheek's last tinge--her eye's last spark,
And the last glassy glance must view
Which freezes o'er its lifeless blue;
Then with unhallowed hand shall tear
The tresses of her yellow hair,
Of which, in life a lock when shorn

Affections fondest pledge was worn--
 But now is borne away by thee
 Memorial of thine agony!
 (The Vampyre 262-63)

Similarly, in Robert Southey's Thalaba the Destroyer, the hero comes across the sorceress Maimuna spinning in a cave, and she entices him to twine around his hand a golden thread she is spinning. Unwittingly, Thalaba is made captive; try as he might, he cannot break the thread. In triumph, Maimuna chants:

My thread is small, my thread is fine,
 But he must be
 A stonger than thee,
 Who can break this thread of mine!
 (Poems 44)

The thread literally binds Thalaba to evil, and Southey suggests that a person may be corrupted only when he or she gives permission. Rossetti understands this entrapment when Laura gives the goblins a lock of her golden hair. In psychological terms she is a willing conspirator in her fall, and the belief that the vampire cannot cross a threshold until invited becomes a method of explaining how evil emerges from within the individual (in this case Laura) rather than from an outside source. In The Living and the Undead, Gregory Waller explains the psychological relevance of this action:

In a number of texts the monster's threatening actions and the loss of clear separation between normality and the monstrous are linked to scenes of invasion, assault, rape, and seduction and to an emphasis on the role of human beings as willing victims or conscious allies of the undead. All such scenes force us to take note of the origin of the monster (a topic often discussed in these stories): Is the threat truly exterior to us and our world, or is the image of monster as invader a convenient way of displacing the threat from inside to outside? In this regard, the conventional notion that the vampire must be invited inside the safe dwelling (and thus into the consciousness) of the potential victim takes on a great deal of significance....(17)

Thus Laura inculcates herself in evil--and not the other way around--as surely as Christabel does in inviting Geraldine back to the castle and the enervated speaker in "La Belle Dame Sans Merci" who willingly makes a garland and bracelet for the "fairy's child" whose "eyes were wild."

In return for her "affection's fondest pledge" (The Vampyre 263), Laura receives the luscious fruits of the goblins. The literary origin of these fruits is problematic: B. Ifor Evans suggests a passage from A Midsummer Night's Dream in Keightley's collection when Titania directs her elves to "Feed [Bottom] with apricocks, and dewberries, / With purple grapes, green figs and mulberries" (157). Evans adds that such tempting fruits were united with an Arabian Nights setting for her description of the banquet in The Dead City. This is certainly true, but a more convincing source again takes us to a work in which vampires appear. In Thalaba the Destroyer, Southey describes his hero's entrance into a banqueting room populated by a troupe of females who "exposed their harlot limbs, / Which moved in every wanton gesture skill'd" (32). Before them lies a banquet:

And he partook the odorous fruits,
For all rich fruits were there;
 Water-melons rough of rind,
 Whose pulp the thirsty lip
 Dissolved into a draught;
Pistachios from the heavy-cluster'd trees
 Of Malavert, or Haleb's fertile soil;
And Casbin's luscious grapes of amber hue,
 That many a week endure
 The summer sun intense,
 Till by its powerful heat
All watery particles exhaled, alone
The strong essential sweetness ripens there.
 Here cased in ice the apricot,
 A topaz, crystal set:
 Here, on a plate of snow,
 The sunny orange rests.... (Poems 31-32)

The verbal parallels with Goblin Market are striking. Polidori mentions Southey's poem in his Introduction⁶ and it is quite possible that Christina Rossetti was directed to the poem in her childhood reading. In both cases the fruits symbolize luxury, pride, sexuality, and sin, and both are pervasive in their power to corrupt.

Given the fact that the goblin fruits do symbolize sexuality, it is not difficult to take the extra step in saying that the juices represent the rupture of the hymen or menstrual flow. And Laura is sucking it up voraciously! The scene--ostensibly a fairy tale--is unsettling to the reader. Clearly something is wrong; the fruits are sensual and erotic, and we as readers become uneasy in our sympathetic response. Like it or not, we are confronted with our own interests in "two of the strongest human taboo subjects, namely blood-drinking and flesh-eating," and we feel "a certain perversity in the sensual joy that some persons feel at the sight of flowing blood. Blood, the 'source of life,' flows out and the sexual deviate laps it up" (Florescu 164, 173). It is not surprising then that in the most famous vampire story of them all, Bram Stoker too reverses the process. Mina Harker, after her confrontation with Dracula, recounts:

he pulled open his shirt, and with his long sharp nails opened a vein in his breast. When the blood began to spurt out, he took my hands in one of his, holding them tight, and with the other seized my neck and pressed my mouth to the wound, so that I must either suffocate or swallow some of the--Oh my God! My God! what have I done?. (205)

Mina wails in terror, "Unclean, unclean!" at the consequences of her travails. But she is not the first heroine in English literature to be so corrupted.

Laura herself is raped at the hands of the goblin-vampires in barely

disguised terminology:

She dropped a tear more rare than pearl,
Then sucked their fruit globes fair or red.
Sweeter than honey from the rock... (ll. 127-29)

This "invasion" has been played out in Coleridge's Christabel when Christabel awakes after her night of embraces in "the lovely lady's prison" (l. 304). Gathering herself from her trance, "tears she sheds-- / Large tears that leave the lashes bright! / And oft the while she seems to smile / As infants at a sudden light!" (ll. 316-19). Once Laura eats the goblin fruit--which Jeanie Watson helpfully refers to as "the fruit of illicit knowledge and illicit sensuality" (51)--she knows "not was it night or day / As she turned home alone" (ll. 139-140). She is suddenly weakened and disoriented, experiencing Christabel's "perplexity of mind" (l. 386) as she enters a hypnagogic state. True, she has done the sucking, but the goblins have also had their feast. Young maidens are the soil from which they feed their "hungry thirsty roots."

Consequently, Laura can no longer engage in domestic chores, thus demonstrating the poem's larger sociological concerns with the destruction of normality, of sisterly domesticity, and of the Victorian status quo.

Rossetti now contrasts the sisters:

Lizzie with an open heart,
Laura in an absent dream,
One content, one sick in part;
One warbling for the mere bright day's delight,
One longing for the night. (ll. 210-14)

Such enervation is consistent with vampiric lore. The victim is mystified yet somehow lively and sensual as she falls victim to a new and deadly thrill. However, "the now pavid victim is not immediately to become a

vampire. She is weakened, not possessed. She may be lucky--the vampire may be destroyed or have a liaison elsewhere; or she may have a friend who can recognize the symptoms of her ensuing enervation and take defensive action (Twitchell 11). For the moment, Laura receives no such help, and when darkness falls she becomes full of a "leaping flame." She manages to lay silent in bed until Lizzie is asleep:

Then sat up in a passionate yearning,
And gnashed her teeth for baulked desire, and wept
As if her heart would break. (11. 266-68)

Libidinal forces are unleashed from within. As in Polidori's tale Laura's mask is dropped aside and she is "hurled from the pinnacle of unsullied virtue, down to the lowest abyss of infamy and degradation" (269). She is as thirsty as La Belle Dame's victims ("I saw their starved lips in the gloam, / With horrid warning gapéd wide") and Byron's vampire with his "gnashing tooth and haggard lip." Laura is undergoing a transformation into something new and horrifying--a doppelganger process in which she confronts her desirous other self. James Twitchell refers to such a transformation as "one of the myth's most intriguing aspects, for it implies a psychic conspiracy between attacker and [new] vampire--an interesting analogue perhaps for our current mythology in which the rapist subconsciously invites the rapist" (10).

Kept from fulfilling her desires, Laura quickly wastes away. The imagery is definitely a reflection of the myth as

Her hair grew thin and grey;
She dwindled, as the fair full moon doth turn
To swift decay and burn
Her fire away. (11. 277-80)

Christina Rossetti suggests what will happen to Laura in the portrait of

Jeanie who has also succumbed to the ravishment of the goblin vampires.

Lizzie recounts that Jeanie

...pined and pined away;
Sought them by night and day,
Found them no more, but dwindled and grew grey;
Then fell with the first snow,
While to this day no grass will grow
Where she lies low:
I planted daisies there a year ago
That never blow.

(ll. 154-61)

This is not death despite what critics may think: Polidori's introduction quite clearly states that a "person sucked by a vampyre becomes a vampyre himself, and sucks in his turn" (261). In his lurid tale of Lord Ruthven, he suggests the same fate for the unfortunate Ianthe: after her death Aubrey becomes a lover of solitude, and in his aimless walks through the woods near Athens "her light step would appear wandering amidst the underwood, in quest of the modest violet; then suddenly turning around, would show, to his wild imagination, her pale face and wounded throat, with a meek smile upon her lips" (275). Polidori implies that she has been infected with Ruthven's evil, and she again walks the earth, no longer innocent--no longer "the flower of life."

The withered flowers over Jeanie's grave suggest that all is not well under the earth. Gisela Hönnighausen has analyzed the emblematic use of the flowers and determined that they represent a fall from grace (11). Yet Goblin Market's images are not merely used as symbols; things actually happen in the poem--there are new metaphysical laws put in motion and the flowers thus take on a more lurid significance. Perhaps referring back to Byron's "Thy flowers are withered on the stem" (The Vampyre 262), the image is utilized as part of the transference of energy leading to the full-blooded and erotic fruits of the goblins. Clearly something or

someone is draining this natural energy, sucking the life-giving properties of the flowers ("Who knows upon what soil they fed / Their hungry thirsty roots?") and surviving on such a diet. The horrifying implication of this energy exchange can only lead the reader to expect that Jeanie is somehow "alive"--that her survival beneath the earth leads to a complete enervation of nature itself in her search for juice-blood-semen.

For Christina Rossetti, such a death would be the most horrible of all deaths imaginable: "How dreadful to be eternally wicked, for in Hell you must be eternally so," she once said (Duffy 289). This eternal curse is consistent with vampirism in general: the victim's soul "is trapped and now she must start an eternity of searching for new analeptic blood-energy to keep from the pains of a starvation without end, a horrible life without death. She has become a lamia" (Twitchell 11). That Jeanie is a lamia is indicated through the image of the withered flowers; that Laura may become a lamia is indicated through the uncooperative kernel-stone and her unfulfilled dreams of melons which, again, is starvation without end. In "The World," Rossetti presents a lamiaesque creature and also hints at the doppelganger process:

By day she woos me, soft, exceeding fair:
 But all night as the moon so changeth she;
 Loathsome and foul with hideous leprosy,
 And subtle serpents gliding in her hair.
 By day she woos me to the outer air,
 Ripe fruits, sweet flowers, and full satiety:
 But thro' the night a beast she grins at me,
 A very monster void of love and prayer.
 By day she stands a lie: by night she stands
 In all the naked horror of the truth,
 With pushing horns and clawed and clutching hands.
 Is this a friend indeed; that I should sell
 My soul to her, give her my life and youth,
 Till my feet, cloven too, take hold on hell?

(Poetical Works 182)

Here we have the Manichaeian contrast between night and day, light and dark, good and evil. And why is this thing so frightening? Because it is Rossetti's "other"--that part of her that could very well succumb to the physical, the sensual, the forbidden. As William Michael Rossetti suggests in his gloss to the poem, "the world--like other devils, spectres, and hobgoblins--appears in propria personâ in the night-hours only; it is then that she is recognized for the fiend she actually is" (Poetical Works 471). Polidori too notices this horror in his own tale. Aubrey's sister "was yet only eighteen, and had not been presented to the world [*italics mine*]" (278). She is an innocent and her melancholy charm arises from "some feeling within, that appeared to indicate a soul conscious of a brighter realm" apart from the busy scene of society (278). Not surprisingly, Ruthven (in the guise of the Earl of Marsden) shows up and "knew so well how to use the serpent's art, or such was the will of fate, that he gained her affections" (282). They marry and, in the final sensational line of the story, it is revealed that "Aubrey's sister had glutted the thirst of a VAMPYRE!" (283). Like Jeanie, she too dies "for joys brides hope to have."

Lord Ruthven and the goblins function as a symbol for all that is corrupting in the world for they are the World itself. In Christina Rossetti's case, one can only try to escape from the world's clutches, but the struggle is a difficult one. Edith Birkhead explains that "Foothold on the earth she admits all must have, but she prays against roothold" (90). Jeanie herself has taken root and undergoes a sickening parody of Rossetti's cherished dream sleep which is evident in "The Bourne" (February, 1854). Rossetti describes a correct and satisfying death that leads to salvation:

Underneath the growing grass,
 Underneath the living flowers,
 Deeper than the sound of showers:
 There we shall not count the hours
 By the shadows as they pass. (Poetical Works 311)

The image is calm and hopeful--"Barren through life, but in death bearing fruit" as she puts it in "Looking Forward" (1849). Corruption of the body becomes important; in "Two Thoughts of Death" (Poetical Works 298-99) the male speaker initially mourns the passing of the physical body of his beloved, and dwells morbidly on the corruption of the flesh: "Her heart that loved me once is rottenness / Now and corruption; and her life is dead / That was to have been one with mine, she said" (ll. 1-3). And later, he describes, "Foul worms fill up her mouth so sweet and red; / Foul worms are underneath her graceful head" (ll. 6-7). The images are indeed disgusting, but Rossetti deliberately uses them to emphasize the beautiful result of that corruption--"the grass is rank and green / And the dew-dropping rose is brave and fresh / Above what was so sweeter far than they..." (ll. 10-12). The speaker, sensing that a beautiful process of rebirth is being enacted, concludes that his beloved's "night is turned to day, / And no more shall her day turn back to night" (ll. 27-28). Corruption becomes positive; the reduction of the corpse to simple inert matter which in turn feeds living matter suggests rebirth and the attainment of peace in a higher realm. Jeanie enjoys no such peace (one must push up daisies, not feed on them), and the combined image of the dead woman, the withered flowers, and sticky, messy goblin fruits reminds of Polidori's introduction when a vampire is exhumed and found to be "fresh, and entirely free from corruption, and emitting at the mouth, nose, and ears, pure and florid blood" (262). The innocent dead who truly

sleep wait "in darkness for beatitude to be." Since Jeanie is not "dead" or innocent, she can experience no such salvation, and Rossetti thus demonstrates through vampirism (the most extreme measure available with its hunger for blood or seminal substance) the horror of excommunication from heaven--a horror that haunted Rossetti throughout her own life.

This inability to experience death is the most significant of the many common motifs that encompass the vampire myth. Equally important, however, is the ability to combat the disease through the intervention of a loved one or through conventional Christianity. Here Christina Rossetti departs from her most immediate sources; in Polidori's tale Ruthven remains free, continuing his corrupting ways in a never-ending cycle of villainy and seduction. No one intervenes to stop him, and the female population is powerless in the face of his onslaught. Not so in Goblin Market where Lizzie becomes Laura's saviour through sisterly love and some sort of spiritual faith. Yet her Faustian entrance into the lair of the goblins is also indicative of the ability for vampirism to spread itself. As Thomas Swann points out, the antidote is "a means to entice other maidens into the power of the goblins, who presume that whoever comes to fetch fruit for the victim can herself be ensnared" (98) (this is a throwback to the belief that the victim will in turn victimize his or her own family). Lizzie, however, does not become ensnared, and instead reminds us that, up to the very moment of possession, the game is not necessarily stacked in the goblins' favor. While Lizzie is told to "Honour and eat with us," she never invites the goblin-vampires to cross the threshold as did Laura. Hence the demonic men can only elbow and jostle her in ferocious rage, finally giving up like the "pathetic schoolboys" mentioned by Twitchell:

At last the evil people,
 Worn out by her resistance,
 Flung back her penny, kicked their fruit
 Along whichever road they took,
 Not leaving root or stone or shoot;
 Some writhed into the ground,
 Some dived into the brook
 With ring and ripple,
 Some scudded on the gale without a sound,
 Some vanished in the distance. (ll. 437-446)

The goblins are pitifully impotent when faced with the power of innocence as are their vampiric counterparts in countless other versions of the myth. They can only slink back into their graves and hope for future victims who are unable to block the threshold of desire.

Laura's redemption is the logical result of Lizzie's heroic action, yet the metaphysics suddenly take a turn for the ambiguous. If one taste of the goblin fruits leads to enervation, why does a second taste lead to rejuvenation? Critics generally agree that this second feast symbolizes some sort of eucharistic ritual⁷--a theory which makes perfect sense if the goblin juices initially symbolize blood, i.e., the rupture of the hymen. And vampirism again becomes a helpful analogue in explaining the process.

Christina Rossetti doesn't use traditional means for disposing the threat of the goblins for to do so would reveal her secret (it would also be too violent). She carefully hides the myth behind the vaguaries of language and alters the rules ever so slightly to suggest rather than boldly state vampirism. Lizzie's heroic sacrifice is thus both creative and traditional. As Gregory Waller explains in his larger treatment of the vampiric myth:

In certain cases the living triumph only because they are innovative. The relationship between repetition and variation, convention and innovation, that underlies the working of all popular genres is, in stories of the living and the undead, a

matter of life and death for the characters and a topic of direct, explicit interest for the informed reader... (8)

Seeking and destroying the monster reveals the possibilities for individual heroism and "the efficacy of socially sanctioned, predetermined means of handling threatening disturbances" (Waller 18). There is indeed something ritualistic in Lizzie's actions; she seems to know what must be done at all times, yet there also seems to be something creative about the whole process. Polidori's introduction may again be helpful in explaining the dynamics of her actions. Polidori recounts a story from the London Journal of March 1732 in which a certain European Heyduke, Arnold Paul, "had been tormented by a vampyre, but had found a way to rid himself of the evil, by eating some of the earth out of the vampyre's grave, and rubbing himself with his blood" (261). The remedy, arising from old superstitions in which the victim must either drink a vampire's blood or eat his flesh, is homemade but effective in stopping the evil. The vampire's grave represents the "other" world of boundless possibilities; to ingest that world (to bite back, as it were) becomes talismanic. Conversely, as the earth refuses to accept the vampire, so too does the victim refuse in a symbolic gesture of renunciation. The action of rubbing oneself with blood also assumes magical, protective properties as the victim literally inoculates himself with the source of life to keep the demonic evil from spreading.

Lizzie's actions may be adapted from the example cited in Polidori's introduction. To save her sister she goes to the source of the evil itself, collects the blood-semen without giving in to temptation, and takes it home. Lizzie's exhortation to "eat me, drink me, love me; / Laura make much of me" initiates a eucharistic process in which the now

Christ-like Lizzie becomes Laura's spiritual redeemer. Once having kissed her sister, Laura's

...lips began to scorch,
 That juice was wormwood to her tongue,
 She loathed the feast:
 Writhing as one possessed she leaped and sung,
 Rent all her robe, and wrung
 Her hands in lamentable haste,
 And beat her breast.

(ll. 493-99)

Dorothy Mermin points out that "Laura's reaction is excessive, but the excess here as in her gluttonous sucking at the fruit is part of the evil as well as its cure. She falls into a highly stylized, rather Biblical frenzy that is like a ritual of exorcism" (113). Lizzie acts as a Christian redeemer by draining the goblin men of their evil forces without giving up anything in return--the "fiery antidote" takes on new, magical properties which purge her sister from the vampiric evil. Such sisterly devotion transforms the goblin juices into a sort of communion wine which, traditionally, is based on the transference of energy through blood, indicated when Christ tells the apostles, "He that eateth my flesh, and drink my blood, dwelleth in me, and I in him" (John 6:53). This redemption, seen in a vampiric context, makes the metaphysics of the action perfectly logical. To drink blood is evil; to drink Christ's blood is not. The juices have been transformed from one to the other simply by an act of heroism and sisterly love.

Typical to vampiric lore, this transference of energy reanimates Laura both physically and spiritually. Rossetti initially invokes a series of phallic images that suggest detumescence as Laura topples under the conflict of desire. Only then can she and the natural world around her become invigorated:

...new buds with new day
 Opened of cup-like lilies on the stream,
 Laura awoke as from a dream,
 Laughed in the innocent old way,
 Hugged Lizzie but not twice or thrice;
 Her gleaming locks showed not one thread of grey,
 Her breath was sweet as May,
 And light danced in her eyes.

(11. 535-42)

The energy has passed from the goblins back to their victim; Laura has clearly returned to the "real" world of spirituality and Victorian stability. The return is not repressive--while Laura has subdued her own desires, she now knows the world's evils and can better deal with them as an adult and mother. The otherwise mawkish and sentimental ending becomes a necessary denouement by demonstrating the Victorian belief in the family as the last refuge of emotional and spiritual order.

To end the poem in such fashion suggests that, rather than merely borrowing from and paralleling a work like The Vampyre, Christina Rossetti is in fact responding to its apparent nihilism. "Women are frail!" exclaims Ruthven in triumph as he prepares to subjugate Miss Aubrey, and by novel's end he continues to prey upon society, rampaging through family after family, young woman after young woman. Christina Rossetti suggests otherwise. Although she agrees that women may initiate evil by inviting it over the threshold, that same evil can be contained: men can be put in their place, the great submerged force of the Victorian libido suppressed, and the fashionable vices of the world replaced with sisterly love and spirituality. The "vampire" of adolescence is quieted--at least for the moment--only to emerge again when Lizzie and Laura's children come of age.

Notes

¹ See Diane D'Amico's discussion in "Christina Rossetti: The Maturin Poems." Victorian Poetry 19 (1981): 117-37.

² For William Michael Rossetti's detailed discussion of the genesis and publishing history of The Vampyre, see The Diary of Dr. John William Polidori. Ed. William Michael Rossetti. London: Elkin Mathews, 1911. Interestingly, Polidori received an apotheosis of sorts in James Malcolm Rymer's (or Thomas Pecket Prest's) lurid, 868-page shocker, Varney the Vampyre, or the Feast of Blood (1847), when a certain Count Polidori is rescued from a band of ruffians by none other than Varney himself. The grateful nobleman takes Varney home where, in typical fashion, the vampire cannot resist making a play for the Count's daughter.

³ While Christina Rossetti's letters have not been published, Prof. Antony H. Harrison is currently in the early stages of editing the complete letters. Such correspondence will greatly enlarge our knowledge of Rossetti's reading beyond that found in William Michael Rossetti's limited collection, The Family Letters of Christina Rossetti.

⁴ For this interpretation, see Edwin R. Clapp, "La Belle Dame as Vampire," Philological Quarterly 27 (1948): 89-92; and James Twitchell, "La Belle Dame as Vampire," The CEA Critic 34.4 (1975): 31-33. Twitchell expands the discussion in his The Living Dead.

⁵ In The Romantic Imagination, C. M. Bowra also takes a "vampiric" turn in his approach to the poem: "The evil spirit who haunts the body of Geraldine and tries to ruin the innocent happiness of Christabel is in the true tradition of vampires, and Coleridge infuses a mysterious dread into her. In her we see an embodiment of evil powers from another world and realize how helpless ordinary human beings are against them" (53). Bowra adds that this triumph of "Gothick taste" succeeds because it relates to life and to living experience, an experience that, in Rossetti's poem, takes the reader into a forbidding world of adolescence with its attendant lure of the sensual and the demonic.

⁶ "Mr. Southey has also introduced in his wild but beautiful poem of 'Thalaba,' the vampyre corse of the Arabian maid Oneiza, who is represented as having returned from the grave for the purpose of tormenting him she best loved whilst in existence. But this cannot be supposed to have resulted from the sinfulness of her life, she being pourtrayed throughout the whole of the tale as a complete type of purity and innocence" (The Vampyre 263).

⁷ See, for instance, Jerome J. McGann, "Christina Rossetti's Poems: A New Edition and a Revaluation," Victorian Studies 23.2 (1980): 251; and Jeanie Watson, "'Eat Me, Drink Me, Love Me': The Dilemma of Sisterly Self-Sacrifice," The Journal of Pre-Raphaelite Studies 7.1 (1986): 50.

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